

Framingham's Local Historic Districts

Framingham Centre Common Historic District
Established 1977, expanded 2015

Jonathan Maynard Historic District
Established 1994

Sarah Clayes Historic District
Established 2008

2016

Framingham Historic District Commission
Town of Framingham
Memorial Building
150 Concord Street
Framingham, MA 01701

[www.framinghamma.gov/
historicdistrictcommission](http://www.framinghamma.gov/historicdistrictcommission)

Cover image courtesy of the Framingham History Center

A Guide to Framingham's Local Historic Districts

Welcome to Framingham's local historic districts. Owning a property in an historic district has advantages and responsibilities. This brochure will outline them clearly for you.

The Framingham Historic District Commission (FHDC) is charged with preserving and promoting the historic character of the neighborhoods within Framingham that have been designated as Local Historic Districts. The FHDC reviews proposed changes to exterior architectural features visible from a public way to ensure that the proposed changes are appropriate to the historic character of the district. The Town's historic district bylaw is one mechanism to preserve community character and the historic significance of the many buildings that still remain from Framingham's past.

The History of Local Historic Districts

The first local historic districts in the United States were organized in Charleston, South Carolina in 1931, and in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana in 1937. In 1955 special acts of the Massachusetts legislature created the Historic Beacon Hill District in Boston, and designated the entire island of Nantucket as an historic district.

The enactment of Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws in 1960 enabled the establishment of local historic districts by

municipalities throughout the Commonwealth. Proposed local historic districts are created by a two-thirds vote of Town Meeting. Established districts can also be expanded in the same way.

The Framingham Historic District Commission

The Framingham Historic District Commission (FHDC) is comprised of seven regular members and five alternates appointed by the Board of Selectmen for overlapping three-year terms. When possible, the Commission includes a representative of the Framingham History Center, an architect, a licensed realtor, a lawyer, a resident of an historic district, and two at-large members. The five alternates represent each of the specific categories whenever possible. In addition to reviewing changes in the existing districts, the FHDC also makes recommendations for the expansion of established districts and the creation of new districts.

Framingham's Historic Districts bylaw and membership is available online at www.framinghamma.gov/historicdistrictcommission.

Framingham's historic districts provide a visual sense of the past, pride in the community, and assurance that the historic built environment will be there for future generations to enjoy.

What is the purpose of a local historic district?

Historic districts have three major purposes as stated in the state statute (Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40C): to preserve and protect the distinctive characteristics of buildings and places significant to the history of the Commonwealth’s cities and towns; to maintain and improve the settings of those properties within the district; and to encourage compatibility with existing buildings when new buildings are planned in the districts.

Historic district commissions do not prevent changes from occurring, nor prevent new construction. Rather they ensure that proposed changes and additions are harmonious with the district’s existing historic character, and protect the character and integrity of existing historic structures. The purpose of a local historic district is not to halt growth, but to allow for thoughtful consideration of change.

The benefits of historic districts are many and they can be credited with preserving the character of historic areas of Framingham.

What is the effect of designation?

Any historic district property owner contemplating work on any part of their property that is “visible from a public way” must apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Property owners should be in touch with the FHDC and Community & Economic Development staff before applying, to discuss the work and ensure that the application process goes smoothly.

Property owners may make ordinary repairs to their building. Only when changes to the exterior features visible from a public way are planned is an application to the FHDC required. The FHDC’s

purview includes, but is not limited to, architectural style, general arrangement and setting, building materials, style of windows, doors, lights, signs, and other appurtenant exterior fixtures. The FHDC’s jurisdiction does not include paint and roof colors, storm windows and doors, window air conditioners, and temporary structures.

“Building” refers to a shelter for persons, animals, or property. In addition to buildings, “structure” is also interpreted to include combinations of finish materials, lighting, signs and fences. “Work” includes alteration, rebuilding, reconstruction, restoration, removal, or demolition.

Important: A certificate must be applied for whether or not a building permit is required for the work contemplated. No building permit may be granted for exterior work visible from a public way in the historic districts without a FHDC certificate.

What are the certificates the FHDC can issue?

The FHDC issues the following certificates:

- A *Certificate of Appropriateness* is issued by the FHDC if the work is in keeping with the character of the district and is appropriate for the property in question.
- If the contemplated change is considered inappropriate but failure to allow it would bring significant hardship to the applicant, the FHDC can issue a *Certificate of Hardship*.
- If the work to be undertaken does not fall under the purview of the FHDC, a *Certificate of Non-Applicability* will be issued.

What is the procedure for applying for a certificate?

Framingham’s Historic District Commission is committed to helping property owners navigate the application and review process when contemplating changes. A list of current members of the FHDC is available on the FHDC page of the Town’s website, and Community & Economic Development staff is available at Town Hall to answer any questions a property owner may have.

1. A Certificate of Appropriateness application is available from the Town Clerk, Inspectional Services, and on the FHDC website.
2. The completed application should be returned to the Town Clerk.
3. The FHDC will determine if a public hearing on the project is required.
4. If a hearing is required, abutters to the property must be notified by the FHDC at least 14 days before the meeting.
5. Before the hearing, FHDC commissioners may view the site from the public way.
6. The FHDC will vote to approve or reject the application at the public hearing. If the application is denied, the applicant may be given suggestions for modifications to present at a subsequent FHDC meeting.
7. If the FHDC votes to approve the application, it will issue a Certificate of Appropriateness within 45 days of the application unless an extension of time is requested. This certificate is valid for six months from the date of issue.

How does the FHDC make their determinations?

MGL Chapter 40C directs the FHDC to consider several factors when deciding if proposed work is appropriate or not:

The FHDC will consider the property and its historic and/or architectural **significance**, and how it relates to the larger district. *What are the building’s important features? Do these features add to the district? Do they represent an important time period in the district’s history?*

Historic **character-defining features** should be retained, and repaired rather than replaced, with materials and workmanship similar to the original. *Features such as wood windows and decorative trim should be retained or replaced with similar materials.*

New work should be compatible with the historic building but also distinguishable, so as not to give a false sense of history.

New additions and nearby structures should be constructed so that in the future, if removed, the integrity of the original historic structure will remain. *The massing and shape of new work should be similar to that of the original building, but a new addition should still be distinguishable as not part of the historic building.*

Interior features, and features of the building not visible from a public way, are not under the purview of the FHDC and work on these areas will be granted a Certificate of Non-Applicability.